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Fieldwork with the family: the art of adaptation

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In their writings, anthropologists and ethnomusicologists tend to be reticent about the family lives that accompany their research. David Maybury-Lewis' 1965 book *The Savage and the Innocent*, in which his wife Pia and toddler son Biorn feature during research among the Sherente and Shavante¹ in the Brazilian Amazon, is an exception. It is an amazingly reflexive account for its time. His description of 14-month old Biorn becoming ill from dysentery and only just getting to hospital in time, is hardly encouraging for the ethnographer parent (1965: 201). However, elsewhere he writes: 'The Indians had been delighted to see [Pia and Biorn] return. For the first time in the whole of our stay among the Shavante I began to feel that our presence was not irksome to our hosts' (1965: 248). It is evident that the presence of his toddler son radically improved relations: 'now I was made welcome in huts where previously I had rarely ventured' (1965). He wistfully describes fieldwork at this time, when they would regularly bathe in the river alongside local people, as 'an idyllic existence. We almost forgot the grim side of Shavante life' (1965: 249). In these days of 'applied' scholarship it is notable that David and Pia Maybury-Lewis went on to found *Cultural Survival* in 1972, a highly influential non-profit organisation dedicated to the rights and cultures of indigenous peoples. Also, in 2005, their son Biorn became director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University, suggesting that involvement in his parents' research had a major impact on his life and career. In David Maybury-Lewis' 2008 obituary, in *The Guardian*, he is presented as a 'model of elegant adaptation' (Matory 2008).

It is a rather obvious point that having children forces us to adapt to a whole series of new scenarios, responsibilities, restrictions and opportunities. Similarly, as children develop, these various demands and opportunities keep shifting, sometimes in very unpredictable ways, and continue to demand differing forms of adaptation. Working in universities offers remarkable levels of flexibility, compared to certain other professions, but also often involves levels of concentration and focus (such as for reading and writing) which can be hard to reconcile with children's need for care or demands for attention. But rather than focus on these many and diverse forms of adaptation, in this brief account, I will restrict my reflections to some of the issues surrounding ethnomusicological fieldwork and how this has intersected with my own experiences of parenting and impacted on my family.

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In many respects, this will be an unashamedly personal and subjective account because, as evident from conversations with friends and colleagues and from the above discussion of the Maybury Lewis family, it is almost impossible to generalise or make a meaningful theoretical contribution on this topic. The subjectivities, expectations and needs of each different child and parent are so diverse as to seem limitless, as is the range of what we might today count as ‘fieldwork’. Terms like ‘fieldwork at home’ or ‘online fieldwork’ (in reality a part of any project today) spring to mind. In some ways, the type of fieldwork in the Bolivian Andes I will discuss might sound ‘old fashioned’ or ‘classic’, involving travel to a distant ‘foreign’ location, speaking another language, and being based in a different cultural milieu from that of our home in the UK. Nonetheless, it was one in which, in many respects, we felt at home.

This essay begins by considering some of my earlier pre-family research, which involved a year of multi-sited research in Bolivia and then several years living in a rural (Quechua speaking) community in the country’s Northern Potosí region. For reasons I will discuss, we did not go on to base ourselves in this community as a family, although I admit that the idea that my children might spend some of their formative years in this environment had appeal. I then explore the adaptations made to achieve a more family-friendly project; one in which, most importantly, both parents could be equally invested. This case involved an urban-based project in a Bolivian city, which offered opportunities for all the family and enabled me to develop exciting new research directions. I also examine the implications, opportunities and challenges of this particular 11-month project for my two sons, who respectively turned 10 and 8 years old during our trip, such as learning a new language from scratch and attending local (Spanish language) schools. Of special note were the sharp differences in experience between my children, perhaps reflecting age, character, and particular experiences.

Going solo² – fieldwork without children

My early years of rural fieldwork in the Bolivian Andes were characterised by physically harsh and strenuous conditions. Over my first year of research in the 1980s I often travelled in the back of overcrowded lorries or walked for days at a time, not knowing where or if I would find somewhere to stay for the night. There were many difficult, uncomfortable and potentially dangerous situations, which I would have been hesitant to inflict on a partner or children. However, travelling singly meant that I was always engaging with people around me, using their language, and trying to adapt to local cultural expectations. On the few occasions I did travel with English-speaking friends there was sometimes a sense that we were enclosed in a cultural bubble. Locals were often less inclined to engage with us (and us with them) unless special efforts were made to establish contact.

Among the rural Bolivians I encountered, the tendency was to begin families early. People were often bemused that a man in his late twenties was travelling alone, and so far from home. Frequent questions included: Where is your partner? Don’t you have children? Having a partner, alongside children, was evidently seen to make a person complete, as well as – in my case – more understandable and less suspicious. This naturalness, or completeness, of being part of a couple is encapsulated in the Quechua concept of *yanantin*, which Tristan Platt has glossed as ‘helper and helped combined to form a unique category’ (1986: 254). The term is applied to paired things which

belong together, such as eyes, ears, hands and shoes. It is also suggested by the way that many types of musical instruments are played in pairs, with the notes of a panpipe scale often divided between two people (Stobart 2002). In turn, the concept *ch'ulla* was applied to objects that were single and without their partner; a concept for which there is no equivalent in English. This same idea of being single, without a partner, was often brought home to me during my PhD fieldwork in the early 1990s, when I lived in the rural community of Kalankira (Cayanguera) over several years. When corn beer was served during fiestas, as a single man I would be handed two *туру wasus* ('bull cups'), one for each hand. By contrast, married couples would receive a single *туру wasu* each. Olivia Harris, writing about a nearby community, even reports that when spinsters and bachelors died they were buried respectively with a cockerel or hen, to make them complete (2000: 195).

Kalankira is a small community of agriculturalists and herders in the Macha region of Potosí. Only in 2016 did it acquire electricity and a serviceable dirt track road. It has no running water; most cooking is done on dried llama dung, and the fields are ploughed by oxen or hand. In this high altitude environment (c. 4200 m), which is prone to droughts and where the land is far from fertile, harvests are often dismal. In short, many aspects of life were and remain extremely harsh, but in the beautiful scenery, friendship and humour of the people, rich culture, and copious sun I found many attractions. Over my years in Kalankira, I lived with a young family (Stobart 2006). Although having my own separate adobe hut in which to sleep, I ate with the family, helped them with agricultural work, and was constantly surrounded by the kids of my hosts' extended family – almost becoming a kind of co-parent. Over the long hours I spent writing up field notes, these children regularly visited me in my hut. They would quietly play with any discarded cardboard containers or film canisters, or draw and practise writing with my pens and paper. I was often impressed by how these children (many of whom are now parents themselves) were so self-contained, independent, and responsible from a young age. Infants would spend much of the day in their mother's carrying cloth (*q'ipi*), while pasturing llamas and sheep in the hills, but from the age of five or six they would be expected to help out with chores, such as pasturing animals, caring for younger siblings, or collecting water.

Life for these children – as for the rest of the community – was immensely tough. Comforts were sparse, and food – which rarely extended much beyond carbohydrates (especially potatoes, fresh or freeze-dried as *chuño*) – was often in short supply. Nonetheless, there was also a sense that these children enjoyed a great deal of liberty. The nearest road was many hours walk away, leaving plenty of opportunity to roam and explore the environment in relative safety. This had continuities with my own childhood growing up on a farm in Cornwall (Southwest England), when – similarly dressed in tattered old clothes – my brothers and I had freedom to explore and roam. Despite the devastating levels of infant and toddler mortality I encountered in Kalankira (Stobart 2006:203), there were aspects of these children's lives that echoed my own upbringing and which I found hard not to idealise. Later, when I had my own children, I even fantasised that they might experience some of this same liberty to roam. Nonetheless, any such fantasies were tempered by my painful awareness of the gulf between Kalankira's and my own children's respective access to education, life and travel opportunities, and experiences of discrimination.

Disposable nappies

I continued to make periodic solo research visits back to Bolivia through the 1990s, usually no more than a month at a time, squeezed between teaching and other commitments. These trips almost always included a brief visit to Kalankira, and in July 2000 I returned there together with my wife and 18-month-old son. I was keen to introduce my wife to the people and place which had become such an important part of my life, and in turn for my friends to meet my wife and young son. This trip to Kalankira came at the end of a holiday which had taken in a good number of important archaeological sites, especially in Peru. I admit that I was keen for my wife, an archaeologist, to develop an interest in Andean archaeology so we could undertake projects together.

As we travelled around archaeological sites together, people were astonished to see European tourists travelling with a toddler. Indeed, our blond-haired son often created a sensation and in turn he clearly enjoyed the adoring attention. On one occasion, near Machu Picchu, a girl suddenly ran off with him. When we eventually caught up with the kidnapper in a grimy kitchen, beside a cockerel about to be despatched for the pot, the besotted girl explained that she just *had* to show our blond toddler to her mum. Some children, though, were afraid of him because he resembled images of angels they had seen in churches. In both Cusco and Puno our son was briefly unwell from altitude sickness leading us to share qualms about the suitability of taking such a young child on this kind of journey, even though we were travelling in relative luxury compared to all my previous trips to the Andes. Nonetheless, he bounced back quickly and seemed to enjoy the excitement of travel.

My wife had thoroughly enjoyed the holiday and to ease her entry into Kalankira I hired a jeep. This was the first time I had not arrived by foot, a journey of several hours from the nearest road. Our arrival caused a considerable stir as it was very rare for vehicles to enter the community, which involved braving a poorly maintained, precipitous and boulder strewn track. The huge quantities of bananas, oranges, breads and coca leaves we had brought – locally considered great luxuries – were warmly received and my hosts and friends seemed thrilled to see us. However, shortly after we arrived it began to snow, and turned intensely cold. (Located in the southern hemisphere, July is mid-winter in the Bolivian Andes – and remember we were at an altitude of 4200 m).

Our toddler son was desperate to explore, and like David Maybury Lewis's account of Biorn at this age, we often found ourselves 'embarrassed by his rumbustiousness, compared to the quiet [indigenous] children' (1965: 248). Also, similarly to the Amazonian Shavante: 'It was not that these children were more severely disciplined. On the contrary they were allowed to do more or less what they wanted. If they were fractious they were just ignored ... and eventually they calmed down and went back to playing' (1965: 248). A particularly worrying aspect of our son's restless behaviour was the magnet-like fascination he had for the lethally hot llama dung-fuelled mud hearth of my hosts' tiny smoke-blackened kitchen hut. Having treated the horrific and near-fatal burns of a local toddler who had fallen into one of these fires several years earlier, I was especially wary of this danger.³ This blackened cooking hut, with tar dripping from the thatch overhead, was the only warm place. It also served as my hosts' sleeping quarters; meanwhile we slept in my old mud hut situated a few metres away, which had since become a store

for potatoes and various parts of dried llama anatomy, especially shins. The hut had recently been furnished by the prestige item of a metal bed – complete with springs, but no mattress – on which the three of us attempted, largely unsuccessfully, to sleep. Anyone turning over in the middle of the night caused the kind sound you might imagine produced if the Eiffel tower were to collapse.

Toddlers in Kalankira don't wear nappies; until they have their excretions under control, they run around in long, typically very grubby, upper garments, without trousers or pants.⁴ To suddenly impose this style of dress on my son, in this high altitude and snowbound setting, would have felt very harsh. Although we used washable cotton nappies at home, we resorted to disposable ones while travelling. When a discarded used disposable nappy somehow found its way onto the ground outside their cooking hut, my hosts were clearly horrified. This had nothing to do with hygiene, it was the wastefulness; the sheer volume of resources used to create such an item, which was used once and then discarded. They did not have a rubbish tip and most of what I would expect to place in a dustbin, they would either burn, re-use, or transform into a toy or tool. Although disposable nappies have been widely used for some time in Andean cities, and I have often seen them cast away carelessly, this object painfully underlined some of the many contradictions, inequalities, and (environmental) dilemmas surrounding my relationship with my Bolivian hosts.

Although I had no particular Kalankira-based research project planned, this experience also brought home the practical difficulties and ethical dilemmas of conducting fieldwork there with a young family. For example, how were we to ensure healthcare and adequate nutrition for our toddler when these were not available to the local population? In addition, this visit had not been a good experience for my wife. It had been cold, miserable, sleep-deprived, and often awkward for her due to our toddler's behaviour and local people's curiosity. For example, while I was away visiting a nearby community, a girl came and watched her change our son's nappy and give him a drink from a bottle, then asking to be given the bottle. (As her parents were anthropologists, the irony of her discomfort about this role reversal, between observer and observed, was far from lost on her). This awkwardness was further compounded by her limited ability to communicate. Ironically, despite my wife's competence in at least seven languages, my monolingual hosts were mystified by her inability to speak Quechua. As an archaeologist, there were multiple possible projects in Bolivia to fire her interest, but Kalankira did not appear to be one of them. This short visit quickly confirmed that long term fieldwork in this community did not promise to be a family-friendly option for us. As my research interests were moving on anyway, this did not prove to be a problem – nor did it stop us making visits and maintaining strong links.

The tranquil city: 11 months in Sucre (2007–2008)

New questions had emerged for me regarding what happened to the local Indigenous music I had been researching when rural people migrated to the city, as huge numbers were. This coincided with the generous suggestion of anthropologist Cassandra Torrico that I study her friend, the well-known Indigenous singer-songwriter Gregorio Mamani Villacorta (1960–2011). Cassandra had lived for several years in the rural community of Tomaykuri (an hour's walk from Kalankira) in which Gregorio had grown up

and spent the first thirty years of his life. Subsequently, he had migrated to the city of Sucre to develop his already high profile career as a musician and Indigenous activist, enthusiastically embracing the new markets and creative opportunities opened by the VCD music video which started to gain popularity in Bolivia in around 2002. This included producing an influential music video of campaign songs for the landslide election victory of Evo Morales in December 2005, Bolivia's so-called first Indigenous president. Gregorio was also an outspoken critic of media piracy, which was having a radical impact on Bolivian music production.

These various strands of music video production, media piracy, and indigenous politics – focused around the figure of Gregorio Mamani – seemed to offer a rich opportunity for a research project.⁵ Together with my wife, we began to plan how we might turn this into family friendly venture, based in the city of Sucre for 11 months. I was already familiar with this beautiful city, beloved by tourists for its white colonial architecture and kind climate (altitude 2800 m). Sucre is also home to Bolivia's National Archive, law courts and is the country's constitutional capital. It was also known for being sleepy and relaxed, where 'nothing ever happens', especially when compared to the hustle and bustle of La Paz, the seat of government. I reassured my wife, as did various friends, that Sucre was a quiet and tranquil place, which would be very safe for our two sons, who respectively would be nine and seven years old when we arrived. In July 2006, I made a short pilot trip to Bolivia to check if Gregorio Mamani would be amenable to being the focus of my research, which he confirmed he was. While in Sucre I attended the celebrations to mark the inauguration of the Constitutional Assembly; the start of the process to create a new constitution that would better reflect Bolivia's diverse population; a key election pledge of Evo Morales. The euphoria accompanying this historic coming together of hundreds of Indigenous groups, workers' organisations, and military personnel, as they paraded through the streets in their finery, was remarkable.

Another critically important task while I was in Sucre was to find an outlet for my wife's archaeological expertise, as she had expressed a desire to volunteer in this area. (She had completed a PhD on the Etruscans and worked as an archaeologist for English Heritage, but had no prior South American research experience). Thus, while in Sucre, I visited the university's Charkas Museum, which boasts a fine archaeological collection. The collection's director, Edmundo Salinas, warmly welcomed the suggestion that she volunteer at the museum. He immediately proposed translating the Spanish language guide to the archaeology collection into English, an opportunity that also greatly appealed to my wife. As things began to look increasingly feasible, we submitted funding applications which, fortunately, were successful, and communicated with friends in Sucre about schools. Taking our young children to Bolivia for the year, and enrolling them in local (Spanish language) schools would, we felt, be a great educational opportunity and life experience for them. While some of the teachers of their respective UK state junior and infant schools shared this view, a few insisted that the trip would be detrimental to their education and future. We were also warned that their places in these schools, situated 2 minutes' walk from our home, could not be guaranteed on our return.

After finding house-sitters for our home and making the necessary preparations, we arrived in the Bolivian capital of La Paz in September 2007. A friend kindly put us up in her 17th floor flat while I applied for visas. Courtesy visas were granted in record

time, just one week, thanks to the help of friends in the national Museum of Ethnography and Folklore and we caught the overnight *buscama* ('bedbus') to Sucre. Again within a week, we were immensely fortunate to find an unfurnished house to rent a few blocks away from the city's main square. It was built of very thick adobe walls and probably dated from the eighteenth century. Little sun entered, making it quite cold, but it had lots of large rooms and was full of character; we loved it. One of my former students came out from the UK to help with childcare, and we paid a local Bolivian friend to cook lunch and clean the house for us each day. This enabled my wife and me to focus on our respective projects, undoubtedly profiting from the evident inequality of this situation. Bolivian wages were very low compared to those in the UK, where we had no home help and childcare costs had exceeded my wife's salary. Also, in Sucre, we benefitted from being treated with respect, friendship and hospitality by people of diverse social classes, despite the sometimes shocking forms of discrimination and racism they enacted between one another. Among educated and elite classes our whiteness, education and cosmopolitanism seemed to have been valued, whereas in our encounters with people of humble or Indigenous backgrounds, amongst whom we had many incredibly generous friends, our engagement with regional culture, including my ability to speak Quechua, was often welcomed.

The house's location was an easy walk to schools and a few minutes' away from the Charkas Museum. My wife and the Archaeology Museum director, Edmundo, immediately hit it off, sharing much mutual enthusiasm and humour. She not only translated and revised the guide to the archaeology collection into English, helped organise the hugely successful 'Night of the Museums', but together with Edmundo began hatching a research project. This took the form of an archaeological survey near the village Zudañez, some 100 km south-east of Sucre, which uncovered Inca roads, rock art, and a wealth of pottery sherds. To help with this exciting work she also arranged for a group of some ten archaeology students to travel out from the UK for several weeks during our final months in Bolivia. This was so successful that she travelled out to Bolivia again the following summer, together with my eldest son, and directed another group of students in a follow up to this survey work.

However, my reassurances that Sucre was a quiet sleepy place, where 'nothing ever happens', were to prove spectacularly wrong. Over those eleven months, we lived through two particularly notorious moments in the city's history. The euphoria which had surrounded the inauguration of the assembly to create Bolivia's new constitution quickly soured. Opposition forces tried to derail the process with a campaign to have the seat of government returned to Sucre. (It had moved to La Paz in 1899). Marches and protests, escalated into extreme clashes and several tragic fatalities. Tyres were burnt on the streets, including outside our house, and the police were hounded out of the city, their vehicles and offices torched. Although we briefly considered evacuation, we never felt in danger and things calmed down surprisingly quickly. Six months later, opposition to Morales' pro-Indigenous government was again manifested in a terrible attack on Indigenous people visiting the city, leading Sucre to be dubbed the 'capital of racism' and motivating the creation of the country's anti-racism law (Stobart 2019). While this was far from an ideal environment for children, it is certain that living through these times taught our sons a great deal about social inequality and the contradictions and tensions surrounding race and class relations.

Perspectives on the children

Soon after we arrived in Sucre in September 2007, the boys were plunged into schooling entirely in Spanish, picking up the language astonishingly quickly, even if social integration was difficult. They did not mind the fact that classes were restricted to the mornings, and our independent-minded elder son increasingly used his afternoons to explore the town. In particular, he would hang out with young artisans who made and sold jewellery and woven bracelets (*manillas*). Not only did he help his artisan friends with sales to foreign tourists, but he also learnt to weave complex bracelet patterns from them – a skill which amazed and baffled us. He was under strict instructions to be home before nightfall (around 6pm all year) and to have his mobile phone on him and switched on at all times.⁶ Nonetheless, sometimes it had grown dark, his mobile was switched off, and he was nowhere to be seen. With his blond hair and frequently dressed in a poncho, we were painfully aware that he was an easy target, but any attempts to clip his wings usually backfired badly. Also, we came to learn that his artisan friends knew where he was. He adored this sense of liberty and opportunity. Even now, in his early twenties, he looks back on this time with special fondness. In particular, he loved the vibrancy of Bolivia's many festivals, with their garishly colourful festive dress and sounds. Several evenings each week, he rehearsed with *Los Juch'uy Masis* ('The little Masis'), a youth group run by the well-known folklore music group *Los Masis*. Dressed in folkloric-style Indigenous dress, this thirty-strong band of children and teenagers regularly played panpipes, quena flutes and sang at community events around the city. It also prided itself on trying to integrate young people from different backgrounds, charging middle-class families a subscription to cover costs, but welcoming children from poorer neighbourhoods gratis. Over this time my son also developed a passion for making rudimentary flutes and panpipes from the bamboos we found on our trips out of town. This planted the seeds for the two-year full time guitar-making course he completed after leaving school, and an ongoing enthusiasm for instrument making.

During our 11 months, we travelled from Sucre to Kalankira to visit my hosts on several occasions; a drive of over six hours along vertiginous, dirt track roads.⁷ On one of these trips, I travelled with my ten-year-old elder son to attend the most notorious date of the region's festive calendar, the Macha *tinku*. This harvest-time feast in early May is famed for its ritual fighting (*tinku*), a sensational aspect which attracts many foreign photo-journalists and tourists (Stobart 2006: 133). Groups from neighbouring communities, like Kalankira, enter the village of Macha carrying their community crosses while playing *julajula* panpipes, or dancing vigorously to the mandolin-like *charango*, and wearing ox-hide helmets modelled on those of the Spanish conquistadors. Both terrified and fascinated, my son fulfilled his desperate desire to enter this festival, dressed in full regalia, together with Kalankira's troupe of dancer-fighters. It was touching to witness my hosts carefully look after him during their ceremonial entry into the fray, ensuring he was safely out of the way once the fighting began. The boys had relatively little involvement in my music research, much of which was located at the home of Gregorio Mamani in a migrant-dominated neighbourhood on the edge of Sucre. However, Gregorio did invite them to appear, dressed in *tinku* fighting regalia – looking cute rather than ferocious (Figure 1) – near the start of his otherwise brutally



Figure 1. The boys dressed in *tinku* fighting regalia. Photograph by Henry Stobart.

hilarious anti-piracy music video *30,000 Chanchos* ('30,000 Pigs'), which features a song style connected with the Macha tinku.⁸

Whilst my elder son loved to explore the new experiences offered by Bolivia, his younger brother often tended to recoil from them – perhaps in direct response to his sibling's fearlessness and independence. My younger son was a model student at the Spanish speaking school he attended, even if some of the homework tasks he brought home bemused us. For example, the requirement to learn the names (in Spanish) of the multiple bones in the human head. He would typically want to stay at home, rather than being taken out to explore new places or even to go out for a pizza. While he usually ended up enjoying aspects of our various trips, there was often a fight to get him out of the door. What he did enjoy, however, were trips to the internet café, to play games or write emails to his friends back in the UK; indeed he recently told me how he had

written to one of these friends to say how much he hated Bolivia. The sense that our eleven months in Bolivia had been a bad experience for him, which he had reason to resent, was only fully articulated to us once we had returned to the UK. While my elder son was offered a place in his former junior school (which he greatly disliked), there was no such place available in the nearby school for my younger son. Instead, he was required to attend a different school situated several miles away, forcing him to integrate with a new group of children (as he had done twice in Bolivia) and separating him from several very close friends in his former school. It was hardly surprising that he became resentful, a feeling that was probably exacerbated by the rest of the family's enthusiasm about our time in Bolivia.

Final reflections

Although I framed our 11-month 'fieldwork' stay in Sucre in terms of adapting to the constraints of family and parenting, in reality this adaptation was very organic. It responded to my developing research interests and opportunities, while trying to ensure – even if not entirely successfully – that this would be a good experience for all the family. My other post-parenthood research trips to Bolivia, which meant leaving my wife to care for our children alone, were short – never more than a month or six weeks – and intensely focused on research, leaving very little time for travel, visiting the sights, or hanging out with friends. By contrast, during our 11 months in Sucre as a family we often travelled out of town at weekends, enjoyed time with friends and visits from family, and made several exciting longer trips to such places such as the Uyuni salt flats and Chiquitos missions in tropical Santa Cruz. Indeed, my wife created a beautiful blog '11 months in Bolivia' to inform family and friends about our exploits.⁹

Unlike David Maybury-Lewis, I cannot say that having my family with me impacted significantly on my relationship with research subjects. In this particular project, people did not become more open to me because I was married and had my family with me, although perhaps this would have been different had we been based in an Indigenous rural community like Kalankira. Rather, my family's presence meant I could be in Bolivia for a more extended period than otherwise possible and that I could share my experiences and friendships with them. Indeed, existing friends in Sucre were immensely generous, helpful and welcoming, and we made many new friends. Also, engaging with Bolivia through the eyes, experiences, enthusiasms, and critical perspectives of my family, was revelatory.

For our children, who respectively were of junior and infant school age, I am convinced that the trip was a unique and valuable learning experience – contrary to the views of some of their UK teachers. Apart from anything else, both went on to achieve top marks in their GCSE Spanish exam. To what extent age, character, or sibling dynamics shaped our sons' very different responses is hard to know. Familiar ways and the security of a friend group are likely to be critical at particular stages, just as a craving for the unfamiliar and new experiences may be important at others. These things are very unpredictable, just as is the ideal age for such adventures. Younger children might seem more adaptable to new environments, although they may not remember much about the experience or maintain the language skills they acquire.¹⁰ By contrast, teenagers may be less flexible, more rebellious and committed to friendship groups,

and a long trip could be disruptive to their exam-focused education. Indeed, these considerations, alongside the negative experience of our younger son and other factors, discouraged us from planning another similar long-term family project.

While my eldest son looks back on our 11 months of fieldwork in Bolivia as a formative experience for him, the jury is still out for the case of my younger son. He consistently maintained his negativity about the experience through his school years. However, now at university this sense of resentment has begun to subside. In its place has emerged a passionate enthusiasm for learning languages and a fascination for international affairs, accompanied by an impressive knowledge – including about Bolivia. Who knows what the long-term impact will be?

Notes

1. Usually spelled Xerente and Xavante today.
2. To the memory of Roald Dahl – who has enriched so many children's and parents' lives.
3. It was thanks to David Werner's life-saving book ([1977] 1989) that I discovered how to treat such burns. They completely covered the child's abdomen and were infected by the time I was informed.
4. I have not seen any evidence that this has changed in Kalankira (my last visit was in 2019). However, nappies are commonplace in the cities.
5. For examples of some of the publications that have emerged from this research project see Stobart (2010, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019).
6. This was a cheap Nokia of a pre-smartphone era.
7. Several men from my host family also came to stay with us in Sucre. On one occasion four of them insisted on sleeping in the same single bed together, reflecting their ambivalence to the city and the discrimination rural Indigenous people often experienced there.
8. See 30,000 Chanchos – Gregorio Mamani <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0P69BaH1iYI> (accessed 11 May 2020).
9. 11 months in Bolivia <https://11monthsinbolivia.blogspot.com/> (accessed 9 May 2020).
10. At around the age of three, my wife spent a year in Tanzania while her anthropologist parents undertook fieldwork. She has no conscious memory of this experience, although while under hypnosis in adulthood she did once recall some words in Swahili (only recognised by her mother when a recording was later played back). This suggests that sub-conscious memories may remain.

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